

Why name any victims?

By DENI ELLIOTT

Many women have reported rapes in the last several weeks. One, because she identified her rapist as the nephew of U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D., Mass.), has had some special treatment by the press — her name was made public. NBC told us her name first. The New York Times repeated it the next day and told us a few choice details about her personal life.

No one had to peep in her windows to get this information (although reporters did that, too). The record is public. But, the choice by some newsrooms to share those facts with their audiences has a nation wondering again about what people need to know about the victims. And, wondering what they need to know about suspects.

Traditionally, the media have refrained from publishing the names of rape victims, according to them a special privacy not extended to other victims of violent crimes.

The problem is that newsroom tradition has a way of getting in the way of fairness and consistency. It's not that it's so difficult to make or justify some rules that work for journalists and their audiences. It's just that the rules that make sense conflict with the way that things have always been done. The first rule should be that the media treat victims of all violent crime the way that they treat victims of rape — don't name them without their consent.

Second, suspects should be named when charged and not before. And, finally, only politicians and criminals deserve to have their dirty laundry summarized in the news columns.

Let's take these rules one at a time. The need to treat all victims alike became apparent to me after a talk with a victim of

what's called "domestic violence."

When I met the woman, she was media-shy and court-weary. Her ex-husband had been found guilty of various charges relating to the night that he came back to the house, begging for a second chance. When she said no, he beat her, cracking her ribs and blackening her eyes.

The woman's physical scars were long healed when I met her, but she was bruised

Treat all victims like the victims of rape. And suspects the same way.

from her recent battles with opposing counsel and with the community.

"I wish that the son of a bitch had raped me too," she said. "At least then they wouldn't have put my name in the paper." Rape victims aren't alone in feeling vulnerable, revictimized and stigmatized. These feelings are shared by most victims of violent crime. If the victim's sensitivities are going to dictate news policy in one instance, they should do so in the others. Newsrooms should treat alleged victims alike, but they shouldn't treat any of them as though they are suspects, whose names are usually made public unless they are juveniles.

Our reasons for naming those charged with crimes, before they go to court, before their guilt or innocence is decided, is based on a historical fear. In framing our Constitution and designing an open government, our ancestors protected us from a society in which secret police could grab citizens

from their beds with no accountability. Police records are open; people charged with crimes are identified. If other citizens know that name, they can come forward with an alibi. If they know the name, they can provide additional evidence for conviction. Naming those charged with crimes protects the person charged and the community at large. But publishing the names of victims protects no one.

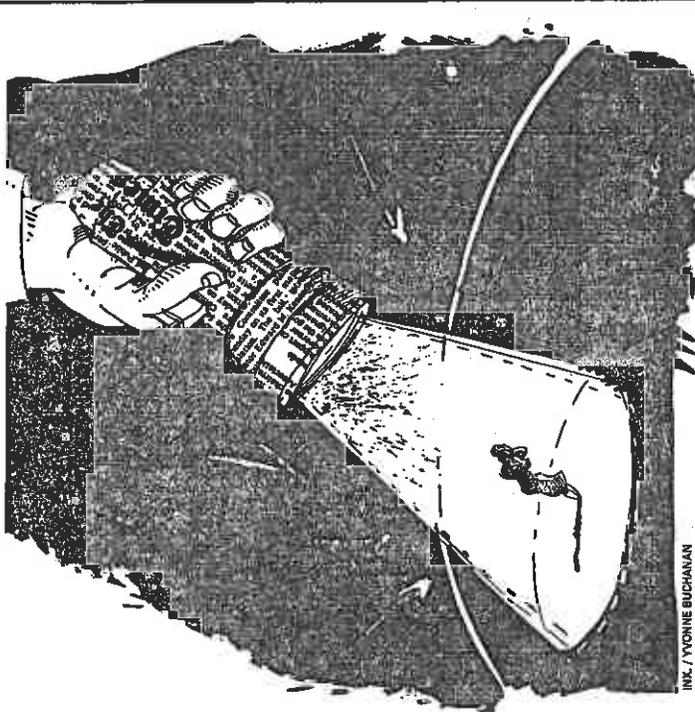
But there is usually no good reason for naming someone before he (or she) is charged with a crime. If the police are doing their jobs, charges will be brought only when there is pretty good reason for thinking that a crime has been committed. Is something wrong with the investigation? Is a police cover-up in process? That's justification for talking about a crime in lieu of charges. But, no one's going to believe that claim only a day or two after the alleged event.

As for publication of personal details about a newsmaker's life, neither alleged victims or suspects deserve to be treated like criminals. Or like politicians.

It can be argued that we need to know everything we can about the people who run our country and about the people who commit major crimes. The first is justified on the basis that leaders who have accessible secrets are subject to blackmail. The second on the basis that the more we understand about the criminal mind and background, the more we can do to prevent crimes in the future.

Reporting tradition has included relatives of politicians as those whose lives are fair game. But, tradition isn't moral justification.

Publication of irrelevant but interesting information used to be what separated the weekly gossip sheets from mainstream news sources. But, the recent New York Times behavior illustrates how access to a wealth of



INK: YONNE BUCHANAN

public information may change all of that. Thanks to governmental computer tapes and computer literate reporters, information that used to take days or weeks to accumulate now takes minutes and hours. It's always been public, but it's never been easier to get. Esse, however, is not moral justification.

The reason for publishing information

that's going to hurt has got to be better than "We've got it!"

In an era when there's less in the private realm, news organizations need to be more judicious in their selection of public facts.

Deni Elliott is the director of The Institute for the Study of Applied and Professional Ethics at Dartmouth College.

Saddam Hussein's a loser to the world but a survivor in Iraq

By TRUDY RUBIN

BAGHDAD — In almost any other country a leader who had been disastrously defeated in war would offer to resign or be pushed out. Not in Iraq.

Official Saddam Hussein worship here is as strong as ever. Night after night the TV news is filled with clips of Hussein — repeated over and over again — as he addresses cheering crowds assembled in different towns and cities. In public, Iraqi officials offer no apologies or self-criticism, blaming the war and the Kurdish tragedy on the United States.

Two months after the cease-fire, the Iraqi leader is firmly determined to hold on to power. His chances are favorable because, for the time being, there is no other leader or political force strong enough to oust him. This is the case, even though, there

topple Hussein.

Since the war's end, the Iraqi leader has taken many measures to ensure his survival. Right after the cease-fire, he installed family members in key posts, including the Interior Ministry, which controls the secret police, and the Defense Ministry.

He bought off army leaders who might have been expected to be angry at their losses, with new perks. He spread the word that purges might be expected in the already weakened Baath Party, a warning to any waververs.

But long before the war, he had already liquidated all possible rivals in his inner circle. "The men who are with him now are tied to him by one rope," says an East bloc diplomat, "and if he falls, they also fall." And yet, Hussein's position is not

totally secure, as he is clearly aware. Iraqi officials have mounted a frenetic propaganda campaign to assure the public that economic recovery is on the way. Newspapers now allow readers to let off steam by contributing articles critical of government bureaucrats (but never of the president). And plans for some kind of multiparty elections, as well as presidential elections, by year's end are meant to inspire hope that changes are coming. A behind-the-scenes debate over Iraq's future is going on inside the Baath Party.

Hussein also is clearly worried about the cash-flow shortage as the embargo on Iraqi oil sales continues and most Iraqi assets abroad remain frozen. He knows he has to restore high Iraqi living standards in order to keep the people happy, so trade officials are

now desperately wooing former foreign trading partners to let them buy on credit. Sources say that some officials at senior levels realize that there will have to be dramatic changes in Iraq's domestic and regional policies if sanctions are to be lifted, permitting the economy to recover.

But, for the time being, all of those pressures still don't create the conditions for the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Barring an assassin's bullet, he will probably be around for some time.

"The regime is threatened," says an experienced diplomat. "But it is strong enough to survive and to guarantee the survival of the president."

Trudy Rubin, a member of The Inquirer editorial board, is on assignment in the Middle East.